Newsletter of Deccan Birders (formerly Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh)
New Series Volume 16 Number 8 August 2019

Details for the August field trips are given below:

FIELD TRIP - 1: Sunday, 4th August 2019: Osman Sagar. Meeting point: Mangatrai Pearls, Punjagutta, 6.30AM; Mrugavani National Park, Chilkur, 7.00AM.

Built as an additional water reservoir for the city during the reign of, and named after, the last Nizam of Hyderabad State Osman Ali Khan, Osman Sagar is a popular birding location and usually yields a good tally of water birds. The areas around the shore are also home to a variety of scrub and bush birds. This would be a half-day trip. Carry water, breakfast and rain gear.

FIELD TRIP - 2: Sunday, 25th August 2019: Geological Survey of India campus, Nagole, Bandlaguda. Meeting point: directly at venue, 6.30AM. Coordinator: Gowthama Poludasu (Mobile: 9440910967)

The 300-acre campus has excellent green cover and is home to many birds and butterflies. We will also visit the Dr William King Geological Museum, wherein lies the complete articulated skeleton of a Rhynchosaurus, the femur bone of a Kotosaurus, and several fossilised eggs and bones of dinosaurs. Besides, there are several samples of various minerals and gemstones which will be explained by expert Geologists. We will also be taken around a Rock Garden that showcases all types of rocks found in South India. This would be a half-day trip. Carry water, breakfast and rain gear.

For both the trips, we will be car-pooling, so please let the coordinator know if you need a ride, and also if you can accommodate any others in your vehicle. Members are requested to wear their Deccan Birders ID cards. Non-members are most welcome; however, they are requested to contribute Rs. 100/- per person to the Deccan Birders kitty. Our new T-Shirts and Caps will be available for sale; T-Shirts are Rs. 450/- each and Caps are Rs. 250/-. Also, as always, please avoid plastic carry bags and containers.

INDOOR MEETING: Talk on "Birds of Greater Hyderabad – The Genesis and The Essence" by Dr VA Manga, Associate Professor (Retd). Wednesday, 14th August 2019, 6.00PM: Goethe-zentrum Hyderabad, 20 Journalist's Colony, Road No. 3, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500034. (For directions, please contact 94905-09251 or 040-65526443/23350040)

Dr Manga will delineate her journey of writing this book, and will talk about the birds of Hyderabad. This book (priced at Rs 1500.00) and her first book, "One Tree Many Birds" (priced at Rs 1000.00) will be available for sale.

Trip Report: Ananthagiri Hills, June 28, 2019

Siddharth Mani

There is something about Ananthagiri – lying unassumingly on a hilly tract in the midst of 'plaintive' chaos. When I had first found myself passing through the place in between field visits, I had resolved to be back there with more time to spare. It was apt, then, that my first trip with the Deccan Birders would be to these hills.

Sunday morning, we rode in our mildly stringed convoy to Ananthagiri. And as the groups sprang out from their cars at the entrance to the Padmanabha Swamy temple, I realised how the bird-watching activity had, over the years since I first began, transitioned from old-school, stationary 'watching' to a transect-based photo-capturing 'birding' event! There were binoculars to spare as sophisticated cameras were the much-in-demand instrument now, and we the contented-to-watch-them-birds people capitalised on this luxury!

The group during the trip (Photo courtesy: Gunbir Singh)

The walk began, and I immediately – and unknowingly – hit a lifer! Many had already gathered under an electricity wire and begun admiring a bird I could barely make out from afar, though I had definitely heard its sweet song many times before. All these years, I had assumed this song to be that of the Golden Oriole, but it was attributed by the group to the Tickell's Blue Flycatcher which was nonchalantly seated on the wire, singing away like no one's business. I looked on astounded through my binoculars (despite it being clearly visible through the naked eyes): a bird I had only heard of – and heard – many times, but today, was *seeing*!

Tickell's Blue Flycatcher
(Photo: Srikanth Bhamidipati)

Post-visit Mental Note 1: The Golden Oriole offers a more rounded song, while this Flycatcher has – coincidentally – a more *wiry* offering, though I would like to believe that the melodic pattern is similar.

Rose-ringed Parakeet (Photo: Srikanth Bhamidipati)

A short walk brought us to a flowering banyan tree: easily the most productive spot in the entire trip! Our novice sub-group itself (that's my brother-in-law, nephew and me!) observed around 7-8 different bird species here, so of course the actual count would have been much higher. We did overhear many other *oohs* and *aahs* followed by newer names spilling out from the other sub-group tongues, which we never identified! But definitely a happening location, this, where I could have been utterly satisfied sitting through the rest of the trip, allowing the birds to reveal themselves to me.

White-bellied Drongo
(Photo: Srikanth Bhamidipati)

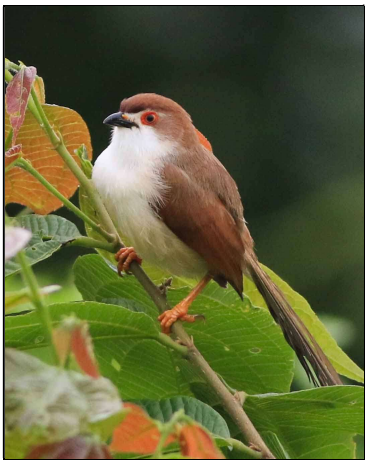
Further downhill, we approached a tree known to be the dwelling spot of the Brown Fish Owl. Now for a person who only once in his entire life has ever seen an owl in the wild (that's me!), this was appetising news. While the experts in the group set about searching for our wise fellow (God bless them!), I contented myself with spotting another lifer – the Jerdon's Leafbird – flitting around in some distant foliage. At the same time, a White-throated Kingfisher gave out its perch call – the 'laughter' I knew so well… or did I? People around me immediately murmured about a 'Flameback', and I was greeted by the knowledge that this Woodpecker had a call very similar to the Kingfisher's! As I stood there, mouth agape, the cohort moved ahead – having already spotted the Fish Owl too (which I never got to see eventually). Post-visit Mental Note 2: While both the Black-rumped Flameback and the White-throated Kingfisher are known for their 'laughter' calls, the Woodpecker has a clearly demarcated crescendo/decrescendo connotation to its song, whereas the Kingfisher appears to favour just the decrescendo mode.

Large-billed Crow (Photo: Srikanth Bhamidipati)

All this while, there were the abundance of Indian Grey Hornbills (with their alternatively flapping-gliding flights), Ashy Prinias (oh, their rolling chirps!), Oriental White-eyes (a sweet little one even perched precariously over her microscopic nest), Common Tailorbirds (busy grubbing), Coppersmith Barbets (berry-picking) and other garden/scrub birds we are wont to take for granted elsewhere – but here, in their secure universe, they remained oblivious to the intrusive eyes that we brought along.

It was a lovely hike, with kids enjoying their gadget-free time too really well. Many an evocative revelation happened through their eyes ("That bird we saw there is apparently the Oriental Black Pie Robin"… "My grandmother stays in Kanha, and I go meet her every week and will soon be moving there too"…) which triggered some futile research and sometimes misplaced admiration among the adults.

Overall, the trip yielded a tally of about 63 different bird varieties – of which I witnessed less than half. I sorely regret missing the Indian Paradise-flycatcher (always wanted to know this handsome bird), and the Indian Nightjar (the last I saw this bird was as a child, travelling on highways in the night) – apart from the star attractions of the day mentioned earlier in this post!



Yellow-eyed Babbler
(Photo: Srikanth Bhamidipati)

But as I reflect on the magic of being in a group which understands the value of birds for their own sake, on the smallest of joys cascading onto every one of us by merely the awareness of another sighting, on the brilliance of an almost-rainy weather prodding us onward to uncover the eternal enigma of a living forest – I realise I can wait. I am home; and targets do not matter here.

A view of the forest
(Photo: Gunbir Singh)

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Snippet: Litter-picking Crows

Contributed by Shafaat Ulla

A historical theme park in France has enlisted some unlikely help in clearing up litter left by visitors: six rooks (Corvus frugilegus). The Puy du Fou park in the Vendee region has trained the birds to pick up litter by installing a small box that delivers a nugget of food each time one of the birds deposits a cigarette butt or piece of rubbish.

"The goal is not just to clear up, but also to show that nature itself can teach us to take care of the environment," says Nicolas de Villiers, president of the park, which receives two million visitors a year.

De Villiers says the birds are "very fast" and can fill a box in less than 45 minutes. "We want to educate people not to throw their garbage on the ground," he says. Sometimes it's good to make people feel a little bit guilty".

(Source: Reader's Digest, April 2019)

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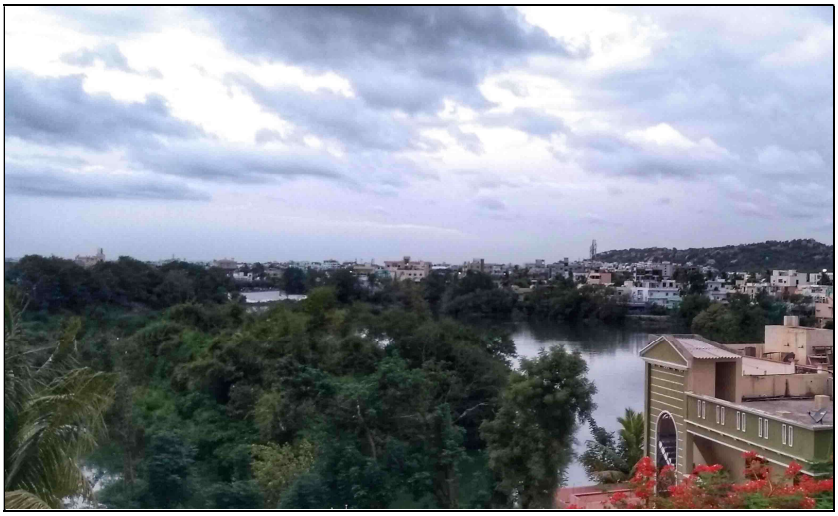
TREASURE TROVE IN MY BACKYARD

Part-1

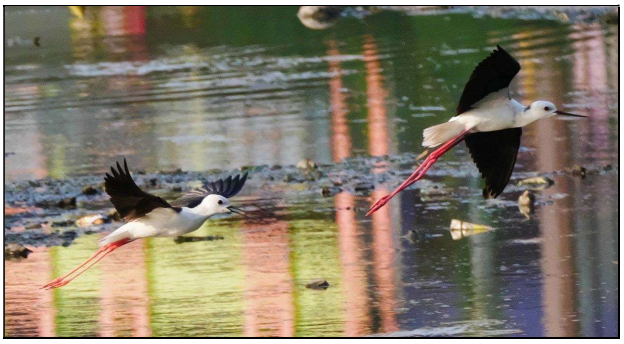
Ambika Pradhan



A view of Safilguda Lake (Photo: Ambika Pradhan)

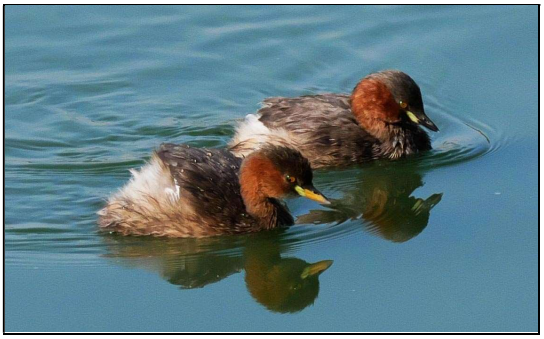
Being a birder is one of the most fulfilling experiences one can ever have. There's never a dull moment, really. Rummaging through 3 years' worth of pictures makes me realise how many moments there had been, that filled my heart with gratitude to have found peace in the woods and to have found people who share the same sentiment.

But you don't need to go great distances to find these incredible moments. There's so much bird activity unfolding right around us which so many people fail to notice. Many of my memorable birding moments have happened right outside my balcony and sometimes even in my own house. Staying at the top floor of the apartment building may be a bane during summer when the heat sweeps through the house. But for most of the year, I've been blessed with great bird activity, almost like an adventure movie that takes place right there.



Black-winged Stilt (Photo: Gurukumar KR)

On countless evenings I've shared silence with a Sunbird or a Bulbul that kept me company on my apartment terrace, while we eagerly awaited the flock of Glossy Ibises that would cross over and roost in the lake nearby for the night. All you need is patience and a good eye. And I've been blessed with the latter and also with pure luck to be there at the exact time during those crucial moments that give you a peek into the lives of these creatures of evolutionary wonder.



Little Grebe (Photo: Gurukumar KR)

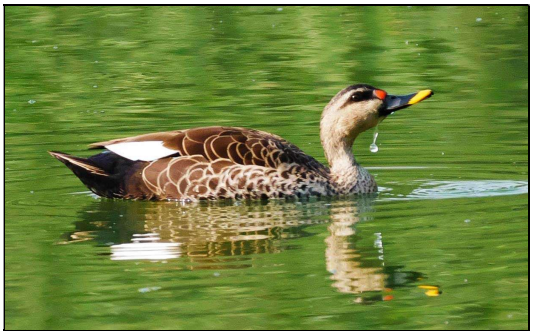
Staying a stone's throw away from Safilguda Lake in Secunderabad, I believe my interest in birding sparked here, by the species roosting on the island located right in the middle of the lake. The beginning months of my time as a birder are still fresh in my memory, when I would take a walk around the periphery of the lake, noting birds purely by plumage and features, and then going back home, leafing through Salim Ali's *Book of Indian Birds* to identify the species. Those were the days of pure joy of solitary birding when the rest of the world thought I was crazy to spend so much time looking at birds. (They still do, though!)

A flock of Egrets (Photo: Ambika Pradhan)

Come summer, the island hosts huge flocks of egrets, which would paint the sky white while circling around the island before settling down for the day. Watching this action unfold from my terrace vantage point has given some of the best memories. Some days, the flock would fly so close over my head that I could actually listen to their wing beats! But as with any other wetland, the real pleasure of birdwatching takes place during winter, when various species of ducks and ibises roost together in the lake and in the island.

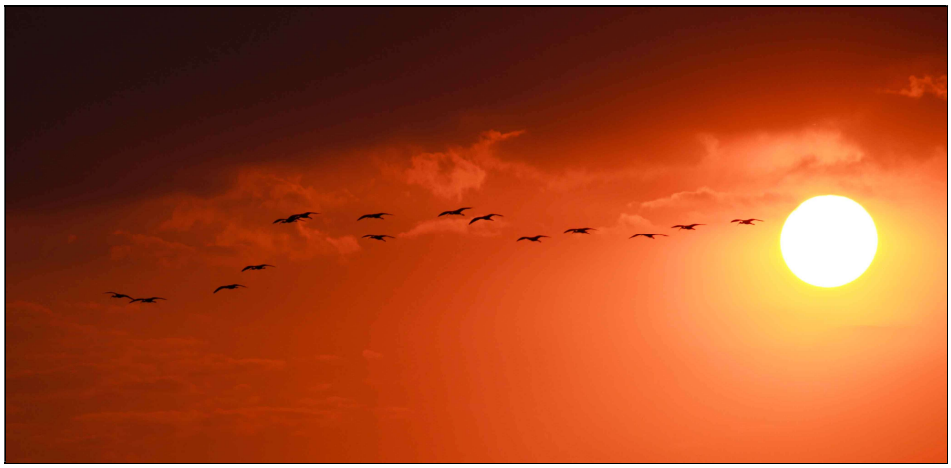
Ducks at the island (Photo: Ambika Pradhan)

The Glossy Ibises arrive first, indicating the change in season. Then come the Lesser Whistling-ducks and Northern Shovelers. Winter evenings always consisted of the flock of Ibises flying back to the lake in perfect V-shaped synchrony. On many days, the flocks were so huge that it would turn the heads of my non-birding neighbours, to whom I am the go-to person to ask about the phenomenon and the name of the species. After the Ibises, the Ducks arrived, although they'd only arrive once the dusk set in. Almost every evening, as the winter sky is painted pink to dark purple, one would listen to the whistle of the Lesser Whistling-ducks, as smaller flocks would come back to roost. The flocks only consisted of 6-15 ducks. But the call (read 'whistle') would be heard far and wide, so much so that even if I weren't at the vantage point, I'd still know that the ducks have come back to roost through the whistle that reverberates in the neighbourhood.



Spot-billed Duck (Photo: Gurukumar KR)

These are only some of the experiences I've had since I started birding nearly five years ago and almost every day brings up a surprise. So next time you're looking for some bird action, just look around. Your best birding memory might well be just around the corner!



Ibises at sunset (Photo: Ambika Pradhan)

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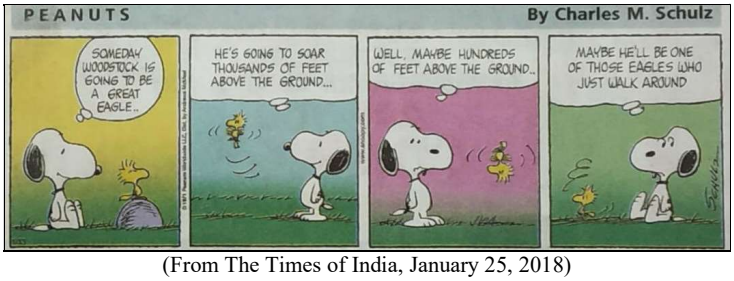
Bird Humour

Umesh Mani


PEANUTS
By Charles M. Schulz
SOMEDAY WOODSTOCK IS GOING TO BE A GREAT EAGLE..
HE'S GOING TO SOAR THOUSANDS OF FEET ABOVE THE GROUND...
WELL, MAYBE HUNDREDS OF FEET ABOVE THE GROUND..
MAYBE HE'LL BE ONE OF THOSE EAGLES WHO JUST WALK AROUND

(From The Times of India, January 25, 2018)

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Trip Report: Narsapur, July 28, 2019

Arun Kumar N

The group during the trip (Photo: Gokul Krishna Addanki)

I am a first-timer to Deccan Birders and in fact, new to Hyderabad. I stumbled upon the Deccan Birders website a couple of months back and right since then, I was yearning for my first bird walk with DB. And finally, the alarm rang at 4.00AM on the day! Along with the excitement of my first bird walk with the group, the whole world conspired in somehow getting me to the Dundigul Air Force Base at the stipulated 5.45AM. In fact, it was still dark when I reached and I figured that unlike what Google Maps says, you just have to wait on the main road! I waited a bit and then called Gowthama, only to realize that I had saved the number wrongly – and had inadvertently woken up an 'uncle' from sleep who said, *"karte kya hain tum log"*. So much for the drama!

And finally, they started arriving. The camouflaged sleeves and T-shirts were my revelation and jubilation. Soon enough, through *chai pe charcha* I got to know everyone. What a bunch, I really felt welcomed!

Plectranthus sp. (Photo: Gunbir Singh)

Onward to Narsapur, the winding roads leading to the sylvan environs surrounding the Narsapur Lake and home to diverse avian denizens of this beautiful part of the world. There are no boundaries, no tickets, just a mud road leading you to the lap of nature. Dense foliage with trees of different sizes and various shades of green welcomed us. The whole place was blanketed in some enigmatic light fog. Oh, wait – it wasn't fog, but fine powder from the nearby cement factory. How irresponsible!

A Black-rumped Flameback with its distinctive red crown, pecking away at something among the bamboo, was my first sighting. Beautiful. Green Bee-Eaters were on the prowl in the giant tree at the entrance. In the distance, a Small Minivet, just waking up – or so I thought.

Yellow-billed Babbler
(Photo: Ambika Pradhan)

We took the mud path and were greeted by many Brahminy Starlings atop the trees. An Oriental Magpie Robin and a White-spotted Fantail bade us welcome. Parakeets flew above announcing the break of dawn. Among the many Bulbuls, a White-browed Bulbul stood out. So many variations and varieties in nature – a source of sheer joy.

This is when the magnificent Jacobin (or Pied Crested) Cuckoo decided to pay us a visit. What a bird! With its striking plumage it was easily the most spectacular bird I have seen in a while. It flew right past us and sat on a branch, giving us clear photo opportunities and a chance to study it up close.

Jacobin Cuckoo (Photo: Ambika Pradhan)

Further up, colourful Baya Weavers were busy guarding their nests and indulging in taking rounds. The nest of the Weaver is indeed one of nature's greatest marvels.

Baya Weaver (Photo: Ambika Pradhan)

Ipomea sp. (Photo: Gunbir Singh)

The Indian Bushlark was up next, jumping up, doing a flutter and going down – quintessential Bushlark style. A lone Drongo was perched atop a tree.

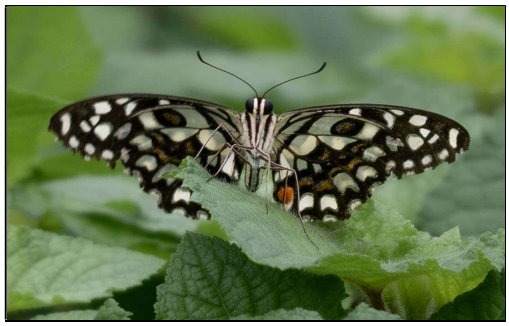
Red Collared Dove (Photo: Gunbir Singh)

This is when we chanced upon the Red-collared Dove and the Laughing Dove. Finally, a clear glimpse of 'bird with brown body and dark brown wings'! We engaged in a discussion as to why the birds are so called; and I realized that the Red-collared Dove did not have a red collar and no wonder I could not find it!

Ashy Prinias were resting on top of human-sized shrubs. Binoculars revealed all the much-needed detail to photograph the same to your memory. Among the big trees ahead, a Greater Coucal flew by.

Indian Pond Heron (Photo: Gunbir Singh)

We decided to make our way to the lake amidst the verdant greens. In fact, I was told that there were multiple tiny ponds and lakes which has been mindlessly 'destroyed' by humans. Just raw fresh earth there to be seen now. I can only wonder what happened to the rich life this ecosystem supported. Maybe I could have glanced upon some Waterhens lazing around and an odd Bittern lying low, but that was not to be. When will we realize the true value of the multitude of ecosystems in the world we live in.



Common Lime Butterfly (Photo: Gunbir Singh)

Out in the open grass at a distance was the Jerdon's Bushlark. After studying it for some time and understanding the differences between this and the Indian Bushlark, we gazed at Scaly-breasted Munias and Indian Silverbills going about their usual routines. Some Yellow-billed Babblers were on another branch, and they seemed pretty busy as usual. An Asian Palm Swift flew by. I could see a few birds out there in the marsh *en route* to the lake, when inadvertently we spooked a Savannah Nightjar. What a magnificent bird! When in flight one could see the magic of black and brown. A sight to behold! Finally, it got to a place where no one could disturb it and we were happy it could.

On to the lake. From a long distance we could see flocks of birds, upwards of 100, resting on the banks of the lake. There was the constant 'did-you-do-it' from the Red-wattled Lapwings flying around. We did not go too close to the lake – not because we could not, but because we did not want to. The beauty of a flower is when it is on the plant, not when you have plucked it. Similarly, birds in their natural environment are such a wondrous sight. Binoculars did make up for the distance. And my, my, so many birds of different types.

Assorted flock of birds at the lake (Photo: Gunbir Singh)

River Terns were flying around, taking an occasional drop to the water, only to return with a catch. Maybe not so difficult for our Eurasian Spoonbill, which was, so to say, covering the entire lake floor scouring for food. Small groups of Spot-billed Ducks and Lesser Whistling-ducks waddled by in the water.

The main group of birds consisted of Painted Storks, Asian Openbills, Greater Flamingos and Egrets of all types. Each one so unique and at the same time similar to the other in some ways. Birds of a feather, literally flocking together.

Finally, it was time to bid the avian denizens of Narsapur goodbye. We were just visitors to their home and now we had to respect their privacy. As we gathered at the entry point, food and snacks of various types were shared, some of them a first for me – as were many of the birds. In fact, most of these birds were seen by me for the first time, despite me thinking that I had seen a great variety of birds earlier. I was humbled. I must specially thank Anita and Gowthama for explaining to us and helping us patiently identify so many birds. And to you and the rest of the group – without you guys, I would still have remained in the well that I was earlier. There was a strong sense of bonding, a feeling of being welcomed. I belonged here.

I came a visitor and went back a member!

* * *

Who Am I?

(Part-2)

Srikanth Bhamidipati

1. Besides being harbingers of rain (needed or otherwise), these birds are considered accurate predictors of wealth. The spots where they feed are thought to be the best places to raise cattle. Modern Africans are less likely to ascribe mystical powers to the birds than their forebears, but one behaviour was considered to be indisputably detrimental to humans: their inability to recognize their own reflections and the resultant pecking was said to be an omen of impending death.

2. This bird played a role in our culture for many years and religions from Greek mythology to Shakespeare's tales. In Greek mythology, a God changed himself into this bird to seduce another God.

3. "Belief in India is that this bird sticks fireflies with mud to the nest walls to light up the interior of the nest at night. This bird was also a performer who danced to the trainer's tunes in India. Exhibitors carry them about, we believe, to all parts of the country; and the usual procedure is, when ladies are present, for the bird, on a sign from its master, to take a sweetmeat in its bill, and deposit it between a lady's lips, and repeat this offering to every lady present, the bird following the look and gesture of its master. A miniature cannon is then brought, which the bird loads with coarse grains of powder...." Robert Tytler noted demonstrations where the bird would twirl a thin stick with fires at the ends over its head. These uses have been noted from the time of Akbar.

4. This bird was singled out to represent romance because Greek mythology associated it with Venus. Aphrodite is often depicted with this bird fluttering around her or resting on her hand. This bird also represents monogamy and loyalty in relationships – nice qualities for a Valentine's date.

5. The dance of these birds was used to portray the love of joy and celebration of life in Greek and Roman legends. This bird is a symbol of happiness and eternity and a favourite subject of origami throughout Asia.

Since we did not receive any responses to Part-1, this time we are providing some options to help you with your answers! Please choose your answers from the following options:

- Hornbill
- Munia
- Silverbill
- Baya Weaver
- Swift
- Pigeon
- Dove
- Thrush
- Cuckoo
- Crane

Please send your answers **by email** to umeshmani1@gmail.com on or before September 8, 2019. Members who give all correct answers will be acknowledged in the next issue of the Pitta.

Answers to Part-1:

1. Owl
2. Hoopoe
3. Kingfisher
4. (White) Stork
5. Crow

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Bird of the Month

Text and Photos: Umesh Mani

Black-tailed Godwit (*Limosa limosa*)

Black-tailed Godwit (Jamnagar, Gujarat, February 7, 2019)

Order: Charadriiformes
Family: Scolopacidae
Genus: *Limosa*
Species: *L. limosa*
Size: Male 36-44 cm, Female 40-50 cm

Description & distribution: The Black-tailed Godwit is a member of the shorebird genus *Limosa*. It is a large wader with long legs, neck and bill. Legs vary from dark grey to black or brown. The bill is long, slender, straight with a slight upcurve, and is dark-tipped with a pink base which turns yellowish or orange-pink while breeding. In breeding plumage, the adult bird has blackish barring on white belly and reddish underparts, and the mantle and scapulars are unevenly patterned; male birds also develop a distinctive rusty-orange head, neck and breast. The sexes are similar, but female birds are larger and duller than the males, and even have longer bills, which enable them to avoid competing for food resources. Juveniles have cinnamon underparts and cinnamon fringes to dark-centred upperparts. In non-breeding plumage, the birds are more grey-brown and more uniformly patterned on breast and upperparts. White wing-bars and rump with black tail band, visible in flight, are diagnostic and helps separate it from the similar-looking (though somewhat smaller) Bar-tailed Godwit.

It breeds in a somewhat discontinuous range from northern parts of Europe to Eastern Siberia and Japan, and is a winter visitor to almost all of India (including Lakshadweep and the Andaman & Nicobar Islands), Pakistan, Bangladesh, Myanmar and Sri Lanka; wintering populations are also known from Australia, Indonesia, Philippines and Taiwan.

Habitat & behaviour: The Black-tailed Godwit is sometimes seen singly or in pairs, but more often in small to large flocks, often along with other waders, in inland water bodies like lakes, flooded grasslands, paddy fields and freshwater marshes, as well as brackish lagoons, marshes, tidal flats, estuaries and sea coasts. It feeds in deep water by probing the mud with its long bill, and feeds primarily on worms, molluscs, crabs and aquatic insects. Black-tailed Godwits are mostly monogamous, and even reunite with the same partner at the breeding grounds after spending the winter apart, but in the event of late arrival of one of the partners, an individual may mate with a new partner. The call is a strident *weeka-weeka-weeka* or, in flight, a yapping *kek-kek-kek*.

Nesting: Nesting is in loose colonies, and the nest is a shallow scrape on the ground, amidst low vegetation. Incubating parents may also use vegetation to hide the nest. The Black-tailed Godwit breeds generally from April to August, and the usual clutch consists of 3-6 olive green to dark brown eggs.

Local name: The Black-tailed Godwit is known as *'Gudera', 'Gairiya'* or '*Jangral'* in Hindi, *'Kalipunchh' or 'Moto gadera'* in Gujarati, '*Tondu ulanka'* in Telugu, *'Kannadi ullan'* in Tamil and '*Pattavalan godwit*' in Malayalam.

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For Private Circulation Only
Editors: Shanti Mani, Umesh Mani **Email:** bsap.pitta@gmail.com

For information, write to: Deccan Birders, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500034. **E-group:** http://groups.google.co.in/group/bsap_online. **Website:** www.bsap.in. **Society membership** (in Rs.): Annual: 500 per annum; Student: 200 per annum; Corporate: 2000 per annum; Life: 3000. (*Add Rs 75 for outstation cheques.)*